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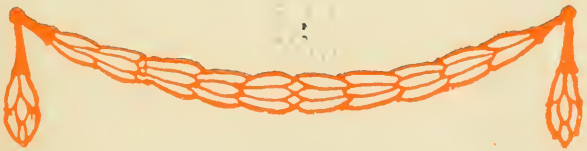
WORLDLY WISDOM *from* ABRAHAM LINCOLN



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Lincolniana

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WORLDLY WISDOM
FROM
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A MAN cannot prove a negative, but he has a right to claim that when a man makes an affirmative charge, he must offer some proof.

Towering genius disdains a beaten path.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

AN honest laborer digs coal at about seventy cents a day, while the President digs abstractions at about seventy dollars a day. The *coal* is clearly worth more than the *abstractions*, and yet what a monstrous inequality in the prices! Does the President, for this reason, propose to abolish the Presidency? He *does* not, and he *ought* not.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A MAN watches his pear-tree day after day, impatient for the ripening of the fruit. Let him attempt to *force* the process, and he may spoil both fruit and tree. But let him patiently *wait*, and the ripe fruit at length falls into his lap.

Gold is good in its place; but living, brave and patriotic men are better than gold.

WORLDLY WISDOM
FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ALL the armies of Europe, Asia, and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest, with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a track on the Blue Ridge in a trial of a thousand years.

Hisses will not blow down the walls of justice.

WORLDLY WISDOM
FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A DEFINITION of general popular sovereignty, in the abstract, would be about this—that each man shall do precisely as he pleases with himself, and with all those things which exclusively concern him. Applied to Government, this principle would be, that a General Government shall do all those things which pertain to it, and all local governments shall do

precisely as they please in respect to those matters which exclusively concern them.

They [the Revolutionary fathers] were pillars of the temple of liberty; and now that they have crumbled away, that temple must fall unless we, their descendants, supply their places with other pillars, hewn from the solid quarry of sober reason.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

BY general law, life *and* limb must be protected; yet often a *limb* must be amputated to save a *life;* but a *life* is never wisely given to save a *limb*.

Let us renew our trust in God, and go forward without fear and with manly hearts.

If I have risen, why should any be hindered from rising?

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

CONCEDE that the new government of Louisiana is only to what it should be as the egg is to the fowl, we shall sooner have the fowl by hatching the egg than by smashing it.

It may seem strange that any man should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing his bread from the sweat of other men's faces.

WORLDLY WISDOM
FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

DIE when I may, I want it said of me by those who know me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow.

The man who stands by and says nothing, when the peril of his Government is discussed, cannot be misunderstood. If not hindered, he is sure to help the enemy.

WORLDLY WISDOM
FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

DISCOURAGE litigation. Persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often a real loser—in fees, expenses, and waste of time. As a peacemaker the lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

IF in your judgment you cannot be an honest lawyer, resolve to be honest without being a lawyer. Choose some other occupation, rather than one in the choosing of which you do, in advance, consent to be a knave.

One man is offended because a road passes over his land, and another is offended because it does *not* pass over his.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I HOLD if the Almighty had ever made a set of men that should do all the eating and none of the work, he would have made them with mouths only, and no hands; and if he had ever made another class, that he had intended should do all the work and none of the eating, he would have made them without mouths and with all hands.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

IF I send a man to buy a horse for me, I expect him to tell me his "*points*" —— not how many *hairs* there are in his tail.

I would not take any risk of being entangled . . . . like an ox jumped half over a fence and liable to be torn by dogs front and rear without a fair chance to gore one way or to kick the other.

WORLDLY WISDOM
FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I UNDERSTAND the ship to be made for the carrying and the preservation of the cargo; and, so long as the ship can be saved with the cargo, it should never be abandoned, unless it fails the possibility of its preservation, and shall cease to exist, except at the risk of throwing overboard both freight and passengers. So long, then, as it is possible that the prosperity and the liberties of the

people be preserved in this Union, it shall be my purpose, at all times, to use all my powers to aid in its perpetuation.

Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time. If there be an object to hurry any of you, in hot haste, to a step which you would never take deliberately, that object will be frustrated by taking time; but no good object can be frustrated by it.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

IT'S the *people's* business,—the election is in their hands. If they turn their backs to the fire, and get *scorched* in the rear, they'll find they have got to *sit* on the blister!

I have found that when one is embarrassed, usually the shortest way to get through with it is to quit talking or thinking about it, and go at something else.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

IF you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend. Therein is a drop of honey that catches his heart, which, say what he will, is the great highroad to his reason, and which, when once gained, you will find but little trouble in convincing his judgment of the justice of your cause, if indeed that cause really be a just one. On the contrary, assume to dictate to his judgment, or to command his

action, or to mark him as one to be shunned and despised, and he will retreat within himself, close all the avenues to his head and his heart; and though your cause be naked truth itself, transformed to the heaviest lance, harder than steel, and sharper than steel can be made, and though you throw it with more than herculean force and precision, you shall be no more able to pierce him than to penetrate the hard shell of a tortoise with a rye straw.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I WOULD despise myself if I supposed myself ready to deal less liberally with an adversary than I was willing to be treated myself.

When a man hears himself somewhat misrepresented, it provokes him—at least, I find it so with myself; but when misrepresentation becomes very gross and palpable, it is more apt to amuse him.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I BELIEVE each individual is naturally entitled to do as he pleases with himself and the fruit of his labor, so far as it in no wise interferes with any other man's rights.

We can succeed only by concert. It is not "Can any of us imagine better?" but, "Can we all do better?"

Important principles must be inflexible.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

IF I saw a venomous snake crawling in the road, any man would say I might seize the nearest stick and kill it; but if I found that snake in bed with my children, that would be another question. I might hurt the children more than the snake, and it might bite them. Much more, if I found it in bed with my neighbor's children, and I had bound myself by a solemn compact not to meddle with his children

under any circumstances, it would become me to let that particular mode of getting rid of the gentleman alone. But if there was a bed newly made up, to which the children were to be taken, and it was proposed to take a batch of young snakes and put them there with them, I take it no man would say there was any question how I ought to decide!

The plainest print cannot be read through a gold eagle.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I SAY, that, whereas God Almighty has given every man one mouth to be fed, and one pair of hands adapted to furnish food for that mouth, if any thing can be proved to be the will of Heaven, it is proved by this fact, that that mouth is to be fed by those hands, without being interfered with by any other man, who has also his mouth to feed, and his hands to labor with.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I HAVE said nothing but what I am willing to live by, and if it be the pleasure of Almighty God, *die by*.

I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to the light I have.

I am nothing, but Truth is everything.

WORLDLY WISDOM
FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I CAN no more be persuaded that the Government can constitutionally take no strong measures in time of rebellion, because it can be shown that the same could not be lawfully taken in time of peace, than I can be persuaded that a particular drug is not good medicine for a sick man, because it can be shown not to be good food for a well one.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

IN times like the present men should utter nothing for which they would not willingly be responsible through time and in eternity.

I must study the plain, physical facts of the case, ascertain what is possible, and learn what appears to be wise and right.

I shall do nothing in malice. What I deal with is too vast for malicious dealing.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

IT has been said, "all that a man hath he will give for his life;" and, while all contribute to their substance, the soldier puts his life at stake, and often yields it up in his country's cause. The highest merit, then, is due the soldier.

I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

JUDICIAL decisions have two uses: First, To absolutely determine the case decided; and, Secondly, To indicate to the public how other similar cases will be decided when they arise.

May the vast future not have to lament that you have neglected it!

The proneness of prosperity is to breed tyrants.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

LET reverence for the laws be breathed by every American mother to the lisping babe that prattles on her lap; let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; let it be written in primers, spelling-books, and in almanacs; let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the political religion of the

nation; and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay of all sexes and tongues and colors and conditions, sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars.

No work — no object — can be so general as to dispense its benefits with precise equality.

Bad promises are better broken than kept.

WORLDLY WISDOM
FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

LET us have that faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it.

Let no man who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him labor diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own will be safe from violence when built.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

LABOR is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration. Capital has its rights, which are as worthy of protection as any other rights. Nor is it denied that there is, and probably always will be, a relation between labor and capital, producing mutual benefits.

Broken eggs cannot be mended.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

LET the nation take hold of the larger works, and the States the smaller ones; and thus, working in a meeting direction, discreetly, but steadily and firmly, what is made unequal in one place may be equalized in another, extravagance avoided, and the whole country put on that career of prosperity which shall correspond with its extent of territory, its natural resources, and the intelligence and enterprise of its people.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

NEVER stir up litigation. A worse man can scarcely be found than one who does this.

Advancement—improvement in condition—is the order of things in a society of equals.

Why, as to improvements, magnify the *evil*, and stoutly refuse to see any *good* in them?

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

NO men living are more worthy to be trusted than those who toil up from poverty; none less inclined to take or touch aught which they have not honestly earned.

The true rule, in determining to embrace or reject any thing, is not whether it have *any* evil in it, but whether it have more of evil than of good.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

OUR people are fast approaching the point where it can be said that seven-eighths of them are trying to find out how to live at the expense of the other eighth.

The smallest are often the most difficult things to deal with.

Were it not for an occasional joke, I should die.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

OUR government rests in public opinion. Whoever can change public opinion can change the government practically just so much.

As to the young men. You must not wait to be brought forward by the older men. For instance, do you suppose that I should ever have got into notice if I had waited to be hunted up and pushed forward by older men?

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

PERSISTING in a charge which one does not know to be true, is simply malicious slander.

If both factions, or neither, shall abuse you, you will probably be about right. Beware of being assailed by one, and praised by the other.

It is not best to swap horses while crossing the river.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

REPEAL the Missouri Compromise; repeal all compromise; repeal the Declaration of Independence; repeal all past history, — you still cannot repeal human nature.

I do not want to issue a document that the whole world will see must necessarily be inoperative, like the Pope's bull against the comet.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

STAND with anybody that stands RIGHT. Stand with him while he is right, and PART with him when he goes WRONG.

I could scarcely credit that I, a poor boy, had earned a dollar in less than a day,—that by honest work I had earned a dollar. The world seemed wider and fairer before me. I was a more hopeful and confident being from that time.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

SLAVERY is founded in the selfishness of man's nature; opposition to it, in his love of justice. These principles are an eternal antagonism; and when brought into collision, so fiercely as slavery extension brings them, shocks, throes, and convulsions must ceaselessly follow.

People of any color seldom run unless there be something to run from.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE purposes of the Almighty are perfect and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perfect them in advance.

God must like the common people, or he would not have made so many of them.

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE shepherd drives the wolf from the sheep's throat, for which the sheep thanks the shepherd as a *liberator;* while the wolf denounces him, for the same act, as the destroyer of liberty, especially as the sheep was a black one. Plainly, the sheep and the wolf are not agreed upon the word "liberty"; and precisely the same difference prevails to-day among us human creatures,

even in the North, and all professing to love liberty.

It has been said that one bad general is better than two good ones; and the saying is true, if taken to mean no more than that an army is better directed by a single mind, though inferior, than by two superior ones at variance and cross-purposes with each other.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

TO remove a man is very easy, but when I go to fill his place there are *twenty* applicants, and of these I must make *nineteen* enemies.

The Government must not undertake to run the churches.

War, at the best, is terrible.

One war at a time.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE Saviour, I suppose, did not expect that any human creature could be perfect as the Father in Heaven; but He said, "As your Father in Heaven is perfect, be ye also perfect." He set that up as a standard, and he who did most toward reaching that standard attained the highest degree of moral perfection.

Keep pegging away.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THERE may be . . . dangers; but I guess it wouldn't improve things any to publish that we were afraid of them in advance.

We don't read that Hannibal had any *money* to prosecute his wars with.

I choose always to make my "statute of limitations" a short one.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THERE'S a mighty amount of character in sticks. . . . Have you ever noticed how a stick in one's hand will change his appearance?

A jury too frequently has at least one member more ready to hang the panel than to hang the traitor.

I can't take *pay* for doing my duty.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THERE is not a more fatal error to young lawyers than relying too much on speech-making. If any one, upon his rare powers of speaking, shall claim an exemption from the drudgery of the law, his case is a failure in advance.

My old father used to have a saying that "If you make a bad bargain, hug it all the tighter."

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE prudent, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages for awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself, then labors for himself another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This is the just, and generous, and prosperous system, which opens the way to all, gives hope to all, and consequent energy, and progress, and improvement of condition to all.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE way for a young man to rise is to improve himself every way he can, never suspecting that anybody wishes to hinder him.

Allow me to assure you that suspicion and jealousy never did help any man in any situation.

There is no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob law.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THERE may sometimes be ungenerous attempts to keep a young man down; and they will succeed, too, if he allows his mind to be diverted from its true channel to brood over the attempted injury. Cast about, and see if this feeling has not injured every person you have ever known to fall into it.

We cannot escape history.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THERE are few things *wholly* evil or *wholly* good. Almost every thing, especially of governmental policy, is an inseparable compound of the two; so that our best judgment of the preponderance between them is continually demanded.

Your thousand pretenses for not getting along better are all nonsense; they deceive nobody but yourself.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE leading rule for the lawyer, as for the man of every other calling, is diligence. Leave nothing for to-morrow which can be done to-day. Never let your correspondence fall behind. Whatever piece of business you have in hand, before stopping, do all the labor pertaining to it which can then be done.

The majority should rule.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time.

Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them.

WORLDLY WISDOM
FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

WHILE the people retain their virtue and vigilance, no administration, by any extreme wickedness or folly, can very seriously injure the Government in the short space of four years.

Time alone releases a debtor nation, so long as its population increases faster than unpaid interest accumulates on its debt.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

WHAT is the influence of fashion but the influence that other people's actions have on our actions — the strong inclination each of us feels to do as we see all our neighbors do?

If destruction be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen we must live through all time, or die by suicide.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

WITH public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed.

I can bear censure, but not insult.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

WHENEVER I hear anyone arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally.

Stand by your principles, stand by your guns, and victory, complete and permanent, is sure at the last.

Nothing is so *local* as not to be of some *general* benefit.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

WOULD you drop the war where it is? or would you prosecute it in future with elder-stalk squirts charged with rose-water?

Determine that the thing can and shall be done, and then we shall find the way.

The struggle of to-day is not altogether for to-day: it is for a vast future also.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

WE all declare for liberty; but in using the same word we do not all mean the same thing.

Shall he who cannot do much be for that reason excused if he do nothing?

If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything.

WORLDLY WISDOM FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

YOU will find that all the arguments in favor of king-craft were of this class; that they always bestrode the necks of the people, not because they wanted to do it, but because the people were better off for being ridden.

Is it the true test of the soundness of a doctrine, that in some places people won't let you proclaim it?

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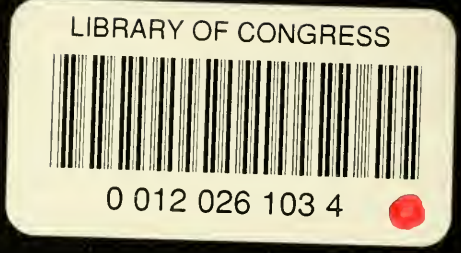
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